

Director's Report on Midrise Bonus Amendment

Department of Planning and Development
July 22, 2013

Overview

This proposed legislation would modify the criteria that lots must meet to be eligible for additional height and floor area in Midrise zones. Currently, all Midrise-zoned lots in urban villages, urban centers and the Station Area Overlay District are eligible to obtain extra floor area and height if they include a specified amount of affordable housing. This amendment would exclude lots that abut a single-family zoned lot and lots that are directly across an alley from a single-family zoned lot.

The proposed amendment responds to comments received from the public that the additional height and floor area obtained through these incentives could result in development that is incompatible with development in single-family zones in these situations.

Background

In 2009, the City Council adopted Ordinance 123209 updating the City's multifamily zoning regulations and implementing a zoning incentive for Midrise-zoned multifamily properties that allowed additional floor area and height in exchange for providing a specified amount of affordable housing. This incentive allows development on Midrise-zoned lots in urban villages, urban centers and the Station Area Overlay District to increase their floor area ratio (FAR) from 3.2 to 4.25 and height from 60 feet to 75 feet (except for MR/85 zones where 85 feet is allowed outright). FAR is a measure of floor area that may be contained in a project relative to the size of the lot on which it sits. An FAR of 2 would allow twice the amount of

floor area in a building than the size of the lot on which it is built. In exchange for the extra floor area and height allowed, applicants would be required to provide housing affordable to households of varying incomes or pay a fee in lieu of performance to pay for affordable housing on a different site, per the requirements of Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 23.58A.

In 2013, applications for developments that were planning to use the zoning incentive on lots adjacent to single-family zoned lots prompted a review of the existing regulations. The lack of transition from a multifamily zone to a single-family zone could result in development that, due to additional bulk and scale, would be difficult to fit next to traditionally scaled single-family development.

Under midrise zoning, development is required to provide a rear yard setback of 15 feet from a rear lot line that does not abut an alley; or 10 feet from a rear lot line abutting an alley. Side setback requirements in Midrise zones are as follows:

- For portions of structures 42 feet or less in height, 7 foot average setback and 5 foot minimum setback
- For portions of structures above 42 feet in height, 10 foot average setback and 7 foot minimum setback

Single-family zones are required to provide 25 foot rear yard and a 5 foot side yard although there are exceptions to these rules. Since transitions from Midrise to single-family zoning occur almost exclusively across alleys, the incentive allowing additional height and floor area could result in a single-family home located an average of 40-50 feet away from a 75-foot midrise structure. While there is no specific rule for appropriate transition, this difference in scale was not contemplated when the zoning was first implemented and could result in difficult transitions to single-family zoned areas.

Midrise-zoned lots across a street from a single-family zoned lot would generally allow for a more appropriate transition as these structures would be separated by at least 85 feet assuming a 20 foot front yard on the single-family lot, a 7 foot front setback on the Midrise-zoned lot, and the right-of-way which is typically more than 60 feet. This distance of separation combined with the fact that structure on the midrise-zone lot would not overlook a backyard would substantially reduce the impact of the height difference.

DPD identified areas where Midrise-zoned lots that could be eligible for the incentive were located next to areas of single-family zoning. This analysis revealed eight areas where this condition occurs as shown on the map on the following page.

DPD's development capacity model estimated the portion of the identified lots that are susceptible to redevelopment. DPD's development capacity model is a GIS analysis tool that estimates the likely amount of development that can be feasibly added under a zoning scenario over an indefinite amount of time

given current economic conditions. This model works by comparing existing development to land value and potential development and applying data on land ownership and past performance by zone to identify parcels that have the potential to redevelop. Based on this analysis, DPD determined that Midrise-zoned parcels directly adjacent to, or separated by an alley from, single-family zoned lots represented about 11% of all Midrise incentive-eligible lots and about 21% of the incentive-eligible lots that are potentially redevelopable. Specific numbers are shown below.

	Incentive-Eligible Parcels Abutting or Directly Across an Alley from a SF zoned lot	Total Incentive-Eligible Parcels	Percentage
All lots	20.6 acres	189.1 acres	11%
Redevelopable lots only	12.5 acres	58.5 acres	21%

Given that the incentive can increase the floor area of a development by about 25% (from an FAR of 3.2 to 4.25), this amendment would reduce the total development capacity of Midrise zones currently eligible for increased FAR and height by about 5%.

Recommendations

DPD recommends that the proposed amendment be adopted to allow for a more appropriate transition between adjacent single-family and midrise zones. As applied in these areas, the additional height and floor area allowed through incentive zoning could result in structures that have bulk and scale impacts on adjacent single-family homes.

Areas Affected by Proposed Midrise Bonus Amendment

